

### **My First Day**

I have been thinking about my first day in a classroom for a while now. The rest of the quarter or semester and all those other days do not seem to register as much as that first day. Brown loafers, slim-straight legged slacks that show just a hint of patterned socks, a vividly colorful shirt and complementary tie, and a sweater made of merino wool, my hair is waxed into messy place, my teeth look especially white, important because I am smiling so much. I know my students' names, but don't have the faces to put them too.

As they walk in they find an impeccably clean room. Bookshelves are filled with enticing bindings, some books standing out on display. The students meander to tables assembled in four clusters around the room. From their seats they surmise all the display. Two bulletin boards—one filled English jargon they will inevitably learn, the other one an empty canvas waiting for students to fill up. A few posters of famous artwork hang on the walls inviting perspective. They have been looking so much they haven't even had a chance to notice the windows and the plants in the room.

As the bell rings up front they see table filled with stacks of notebooks. They can probably see how nervous and excited I am. I am not very good at hiding my emotions. I have waited such a long time for this day, this moment when the bell has finally silenced my students and when it is obviously time for me to begin introducing myself, begin teaching brings everything from my early days in preschool, that misty morning in my red-rain jacket and polar bear turtleneck on my way to Kindergarten, all that time at Ebenezer, Canada kissing America, running in what were farmers' fields, Lynden Christian's blue and white halls, all the time in the Performance Art Center, marching in my blue cap and gown, and all of my time at the University

of Maine Farmington. I say my name, I am Johnny Bu—realizing I shouldn't have said my first name, I correct myself laughing, "I am Mr. Buys." I begin reading out loud to them...

### **Philosophy of Education**

I like to think that my life philosophy can be captured in a simple aphorism attributed to anonymous (all the good ones are after all): "All that I do not love, I have overlooked." This expression invites a reflective existence. It encourages learning. It believes in the beauty and potential of all things. It demands that nothing be left unexplored for its value and place in existence. Yet, it recognizes failures and shortcomings, but with a solution provided. I believe education is all those things. I believe education is the discovery self in existence. I believe that education should not leave anything overlooked.

School and learning came naturally for me. A fourth generation educator, education was always held in high esteem, enough so, that my parents paid for private elementary and secondary education. My education was excellent. With my initiative to achieve academically and my gregarious personality, school was a natural fit. I have always been a teacher's pet. The traditional classroom model felt tailored to my learning. It's not that I didn't have particular areas where I excelled and others that challenged me; I was just a student to my very core. School was an escape to all the things I enjoyed.

Part of me worries that my value of education and natural fit into the school environment will distance me from my learners. Fundamentally, I believe that all people can learn. With an exceptional teacher and developed curriculum any student can be successful. I believe in high expectations for all learners including myself as a teacher. I believe the most important aspect of education and learning is providing students the opportunities to discover and explore themselves and others. I am so excited to be an English language arts teacher for this very reason. It is true

that I excelled as a student in my English courses throughout elementary and secondary school. Reading from an early age, I developed an extensive affection for the written word. My love of literature came first followed later by a love of writing, rhetoric, and linguistics. I am undecided between middle school and high school. I believe both age groups are in a remarkable stage of development that should always be the primary concern of a secondary teacher. College and career preparation are important as the Common Core State Standards would attest, however, to forget students in the moment is disrespectful for students own self-efficacy and exploration of themselves as character.

It is the power of this exploration that makes me want to be an English language arts teacher now. The power of language and communication is undeniable. It is the most important skill students need to be participants in exploration of self and others. Language is a tool. My passion for how great thoughts have used literature to capture the human condition or to escape it and for rhetoric and writing to be an instrument of empowerment makes me want to share the amazing heritage of the English language with not only those students who have heard it from birth, but also those students that are new to this country or anxious to participate in the discourse of English. I am happy to be in the general classroom, but I also want to use my skills as an educator to teach English language learners.

My background in education, my content, and my understanding of education have made me a mold of three very different education philosophies resulting in the tailored me. Selecting the portions I fit in best, I am a constructivist, a humanist, and a perennialist educator.

This unique blend is captured in various educators from history who have transformed the world and thoughts of education too. Much of that is rooted in Socrates' philosophy of education. Socrates created a "teacherless education in which the teacher's role was to draw the

knowledge out of the student” (Voices of Educational Pioneers). Focusing on developing questions Socrates’s educational aphorism “know thyself; the unexamined life is not worth living” flows into what self-discovery I want English language arts to do in my students’ lives (Voices). It also fits in nicely with my personal aphorism of “all that I do not love I have overlooked.”

Another dynamic voice in education was the teaching example of Jesus. As a Christian my affection for the principles of Christ’s teaching flow effortlessly into my beliefs in the classroom. When Jesus commanded his followers to “love thy neighbor as thyself,” he gave them the responsibility to being *shalom* to this world. I believe with all my heart, the education has the power to transform this world and bring the greatest amount and love for the least, the lost, and lonely. As an educator, I have a responsibility to all of my students. Jesus was first a caring rabbi. Jesus’s educational style was also varied including “lecture, reading from texts (scripture), storytelling, illustration, parallel sayings (repetition), silence (wait time),” “conversation, discussion forum, question-answer, and panel (answer-question),” and “object lessons, dramatics, demonstration, laboratory, and topical research” (Voices). The variability of his educational styles should be modeled by every teacher. His affection for all students make him an admirable model the defeats any doubts of my own ability to reach out to students who don’t share initiative for academics or comfort with the education model. Christ’s development of the present concerns of his students and anagogical concerns also makes him admirable to the classroom that wants to ask large questions of students. Christ was in some ways the original humanist educator, putting his students and their relationships above his own physical concerns.

Development for the person and character through education in the styles of Jesus and Socrates’ were centered on students with a teacher-centered structure that required exceptional

responsibility for the teacher in developing environments of opportunities for learning. While I believe in the importance of the teacher's responsibility in particular areas of the classroom, Tyler, Piaget and Freire stand out as model educational philosophers for my constructivist learnings. Tyler's interdisciplinary studies and cooperative learning are aspects that I hope to utilize throughout my curriculum development. Piaget as the foundation of child and adolescent developmental psychology and education makes his principles of education for developmental appropriateness foundational to how I approach the classroom. Freire's social individualism, student dialogue, and continuous knowledge journey of conscious development of freedoms approach my student-centered values for the classroom as well specifically into my constructivist values. Paulo Ferire stands out as an educator I identify with in that he demands education to consider issues of race, class, and gender and the inequalities that exist. His attention to social issues extends into my own beliefs of the importance of social justice in the classroom.

Of all the educational philosophies I identify with the most as a professional it is my constructivist leanings. My educational experience and English ask me to develop some of my essentialist leanings that theorized in perennialism. Students need foundations. The greatest examples and debates will have lasting meaning in students' development of their own participation in this world. Life is full of unanswered questions. I want my students to leave my classroom better prepared to explore the world. I do not want them to have established answers or universal truths, but I want them to be ready to participate and be prepared to explore their own conscious voice in existence. Whatever answers can be reached in the great debates are part of who an individual is and need to be developed. I believe too in the immense responsibility the teacher has as a master of content. Students are not the empty pail that the teacher pours information into, but rather a full pail the teacher needs to know how to pour out.

I value the humanist's stress of Buber's I-Thou relationship in the classroom. Relationships that I will build as a teacher between my students and myself and encourage between learners require a humanist leaning.

However for all those aspects of my educational experience and content knowledge, I lean most into a constructivist approach as a professional and student of education. As an English teacher, student dialogue, debate, and critical thinking development used to develop personal meaning is the foundation of what I believe education can do. Those are all the essential skills students need to be change agents that do not overlook anything. Diversity and respect for the individual and their expressions of learning are what makes education the most meaningful for individuals to take with them for the rest of their life. It is their education. Their ownership of classroom organization that involves student input, their work and access to diverse materials, learning focuses that are meaningful and question their understandings of the world and their peers, and classroom climate that values the student and each other for all their diverse experience above all else, control what my teaching style, and disciplinary approach.

### **Philosophies in Action**

**Classroom Organization:** Classroom organization should always be designed to be most efficient for students to interact with each other. It is important that the organization encourage discipline of self. Margaret Thatcher stressed the importance of disciplining and developing oneself saying, "Disciplining yourself to do what you know is right and important, although difficult, is the highroad to pride, self-esteem, and personal satisfaction." I believe that classroom organization is disciplined. Not because teachers or students need to be in control, but because the teacher and the student have an immense responsibility in the classroom. As I have said, I do not define myself in a clear distinction between student or teacher-centered. The

teacher has a responsibility to craft and facilitate a system that students can participate and own. The teacher's mastery needs to foster the mastery that students can possess. The student needs to develop their sense of self interacting and developing mastery. They need to develop the discipline the skills for necessary for autonomy. Their "pride, self-esteem, and personal satisfaction" should always be at the forefront of classroom organization.

I want my students to know they are there to learn. The classroom will be the most conducive tool for each individual learner when have their own space and feel free to express them and learn comfortably. It is necessary that the classroom be reflective of diversity. It will also celebrate them as individuals. The major characteristics of organization in my classroom will be flexibility (especially in favor of student interest), optimism, self-reflection, and innovation. While I believe in sound structure and regularity with certain principles in the classroom, I also want the format of my classroom organization to not look the same for every student. The unique learning demands of each class will be a priority in developing curriculum and authentic learning opportunities.

**Classroom Climate:** The right classroom organization is only effective when classroom climate fosters the necessary approach. I believe in a noisy classroom. I want my classroom to be a think-tank of free-flowing ideas and expression. I want students to debate. In order for learners to debate though, they need to feel respected and comfortable to express themselves as individuals. Environment should cultivate solidarity in respect of individual expression. Students and teachers need to consider their relationships as paramount to learning. While I am a leader, I am also a supporter for all students.

I believe in structure. I believe that the environment of classroom should always be communicative and learning-centered. Above all, I have high-expectations for learning. That

feeling should be pervasive and recognizable to all students and anyone else interested in attending my classroom. I want to be an interactionist in the classroom. I believe in questions, modeling, and reinforcement as the necessary elements of effective discipline. I intend to develop all of those characteristics of interactionist into my classroom. My authority is derived not from my age, but from my mastery and shared privilege of leadership. That being said, I am fearful that I will be a noninterventionist. While in some situations it is important for students to work through situations and find solutions, other times call for teacher's response.

**Teaching and Leadership Style:** Leadership is an essential element to maintain climate. I am a facilitative and democratic leader. Most comfortable as a facilitator negotiating relationships and the movement of ideas, I am developing myself as a democratic leader because I believe in the principles and remarkability of autonomy and shared responsibility for leadership. Students need the opportunity to learn and practice leadership. The classroom is an appropriate venue for that. Democratic leadership is not leaderless leadership. It is driven by dynamic leaders with the full support of the group. Student and teacher leaders alike need to be aware of that responsibility.

I believe in inquiry based learning with a final goal of learning about self better. Learning occurs best when multiple voices and perspectives are presented.

I am both teacher-centered and student-centered for the sake of learning. I believe in the teacher has an immensity of responsibility to foster learning. The educator is the master and wants to develop the mastery of the students. As a teacher-centered educator I want my classroom to be centered on my students through everything I do to achieve their potential as learners. The educator is also a learner though.



Students have an incredible responsibility to be learners. Learning is both communal and individual. For students to direct learning and find the harmonious balance is part of my student-centered approach. Students also have the responsibility to be engaged learners.

I want my teaching to be all-encompassing though. I want language arts to exist beyond English class and its literary cannon and five-paragraph essay. I want it to be infused and integrated with history, philosophy, art, and science. I want my teaching to be multicultural and empowering for every learner.

**Motivation:** My students will be motivated to learn foremost, by their opportunities to discover themselves and their developing individualism and membership in community through the context of English language arts. This empowering quality is necessary for education to be meaningful. They will explore literature as a mirror of the human condition and writing as their voice. I will encourage their autonomy through self-directed study, but their position as a member of a community and tradition of learning as well.

Motivation is not only internally produced though. I intend to motivate students through my energy and enthusiasm. I want to tap into their knowledge bases and passion. My expectations for them and the energy I take to my subject should encourage them to be all they can be and perform for themselves and me as well.

**Learning Focus:** My students will not learn language arts. They will learn who they are through language arts. They will be free to develop their personhood in all its mystique and mess. They shall develop a respect for individuals as members of a wider conversation. They will recognize the sacristy of their selves and their peers. I want them to be participants in the world as transformative agents. I want them to listen to conversations and arguments of the past, recognize their own discourse, and where they belong in it.

**Content:** I am an English language arts enthusiast. Above all, I am a learner of people. Every individual is a complex entity of emotions and perspective. I want to teach my students how to listen, how to question, and how to articulate their participation in society. Truman Capote said “All literature is gossip.” Language is capturing the communication of individuals. Linguistics will tell you that language is what separates us from animals. Our language is our soul. I want to students to know their soul.

Language is an art and science. I want students to know literature and writing as the science and art that it is. I want them to own their language. I want their capacity with the English language to be more than functional literacy. I want them to take responsibility for the development of their soul. I want them to be life-long readers who listen and question what conversations it participates in. I want students to writers, to see expression of the individual and their soul. I want English language arts to exist beyond the confines of the classroom. English language arts and assessment should be reflective of the whole-student, not just the student in Mr. Buys’s period four freshmen English course.

**Assessment:** The right implementation of curriculum and content should inspire students to make products that require assessment. I believe in assessment’s power. Without the reflection and scrutiny of assessment existence is blind. Assessment needs to be formative and summative. Assessment needs to not be high risk that encourages only snapshots of learning. That avoids the entirety of the person and their process of learning. Assessment needs to acknowledge the process of learning and development. Assessment is best when not constructed singularly. Formative assessment should take many forms. It should be both recognizable and unrecognizable. Students should not go into summative assessments not feeling supported and

scaffolded to success. Formative assessment should build to summative assessment that is both cumulative and reflective. Assessment needs to be innovative.

Students should be aware of the standards they are being assessed on and recognize what the assessment means. I do not believe in fixed-assessment. As developing and dynamic individuals, assessment needs to take into account human development. If it can capture the dynamisms, I will be more likely to use it. This is the reason I intend to use a lot of working portfolios.

**Technology Integration:** Technology is not more important than students or the ideas. I will not promote technology for the sake of meaningless practice and employment. Technology will be used to benefit a student as a learner of language arts.

As an educator, I have a responsibility to prepare my students to be active agents of change and civically engaged participants in the twenty-first century. As an English language arts teacher, encouraging students to communicate through technology is of utmost importance for their success in a technologically advanced society.

Students need to effectively, structurally, creatively, and daringly use technology to their advantage to express their values, positions, and perspectives and understand other individual and group values, positions, and perspectives too. Having access to relevant and reliable information and the ability to discern information is a priority for students who are developing their sense of identity in the high visibility of the technologically connected world. Similarly, using technology will foster inter-global relationships that are paramount to the United States' position in the world's future.

Also, technology is an opportunity for school to be the equalizer it has been promised to be in the past. With the support and responsible usage of technology, any and every student can

have the advantages of access to unlimited information and development of potential skills to allow students to break the barriers that zip codes and their attached property taxes can have on student success and school.

Used as tools for instruction, technology will encourage students to be better communicators and active technology citizens. As a teacher my responsibility is to identify, develop, and infuse technology into my classroom for my students' success. That being the case, Technology is not more important than students or the ideas. I will not promote technology for the sake of meaningless practice and employment. Technology will be used to benefit a student as a learner of language arts.

### Conclusion

I am back in front of the room, controlled breathing, slowly beginning, "The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious..."